

## INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH OF PASTORAL COUNSELING IN HELPING RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract: Pastoral counseling is an integral approach that sees a client in the context of the integration of the whole personality. This article explores counseling as an interdisciplinary practice at the intersection of theology and social sciences. It defines counseling conceptually, describes its dynamics as a supportive relationship between the professional and the client, and compares the common features and differences between counseling, psychotherapy, and spiritual direction. Finally, it discusses the goals and principles of pastoral counseling specifically, characterizes the personality of the pastoral counselor, describes the dynamics of the process itself, and describes the method of therapeutic intervention.

Key words: counseling, spiritual direction, pastoral counseling, integration

### Introduction

Pastoral counseling brings a new perception of the concept of counseling that takes into account the whole person with their biological, psychological and spiritual side. It appears as an interdisciplinary field of theology and psychology.

It emphasizes the basic principles of counseling, empathy, listening, and highlights building a relationship with the client as a core value, opening the client to personal growth, insight into their inner self and leading them to a change related to new knowledge, acquired skills and also coping with stressful and burdensome situations.

It highlights the need to integrate professional skills and spiritual values in the process of accompanying the client. It presents professional preparation and intervention in practice, based on the model of Loyola University's Department of Pastoral Counseling in Maryland.

### 1 Counseling

The topic of counseling seems to be a recent phenomenon that seeks to interconnect overly stressful professions. It is not directly related to training and the educational process, but enters into it, thus helping the client to overcome difficulties. It touches little on maladaptive behavior and structural change of personality, but helps it to accept reality and to seek appropriate ways of integrating into the world. It does not deal purely with personality disorders and does not use medication to deal with reality. May (2001) sees the role of the counselor as the one who deals with problems that are, for example, difficult for a teacher to deal with within the teaching process, but are not yet of such magnitude and depth as to require a consultation with a psychologist or psychiatrist.

Counseling according to Cavanagh (1982) indicates the relationship between the professional and the person seeking help. It is a relationship in which not only the use of professional skills is important, but also the atmosphere in which counseling takes place, in order to help the client find a relationship with themselves and also with others through appropriate productive ways.

Lartey (2003) lists seven key elements of counseling by which a counselor:

1. has to be professionally trained for this service
2. has to be in a relationship with the person being helped
3. needs both professional skills and personal characteristics for such service
4. helps the client acquire new skills
5. teaches the client to build a relationship with him/herself
6. shows how to create relationships that promote growth
7. expresses the relationship between the counselor and the client through the counseling process.

Lambourne (1988) says that the heart of counseling is promoting the uniqueness and dignity of the client. It is a relationship based on a skilled professional who offers the client an opening up, the acquisition of new inner knowing, and who helps the client to recognize the cause and affectivity of their behavior. Thus, counseling as described by Lambourne (1988) is based on skills, principles that promote self-knowledge, emotional acceptance, growth, and optimal development of personal resources. Overall, it provides the client with the opportunity to live a full and satisfying life.

Based on the above, we can say that the novelty of counseling is to answer questions within a given approach to the client, namely: how can the counselor be qualitatively differently present for the client? How can the counselor create a significantly different environment from the client's previous experience? Lartey (2003) argues that it is important for the counselor to help the client recognize negative self-evaluations, internal conflicts, negative imperatives, conflicting needs, and mistaken attitudes. In the same way, the counselor guides the client to come to terms with reality, to expand his or her self-knowledge, to be able to form new relationships, and to foster growth toward inner freedom.

Models of counseling are based on the basic schools of psychology. Psychodynamically oriented approaches are focused on the client's inner knowledge. Cognitive-behavioral approaches focus on changing the client's external behavior. Humanistic approaches are oriented towards creating relationships in the here and now, and transpersonal approaches, such as logotherapy, help to search for and discover the meaning of life.

May (2001) sees the difference between counseling and psychotherapy as

1. Counseling is more focused on personal growth, psychotherapy on deviance.
2. Counseling is more educational, supportive, reality-oriented and short-term. Therapy is more focused on personality reconstruction, is confrontational and long-term.
3. Counseling is more structured and goal-oriented, working with specific goals. Psychotherapy is more ambivalent, has goals that are evaluated in parallel with the therapeutic process.

Lartey (2003) stresses that all the psychological approaches mentioned have in common what characterizes any counseling, namely: listening, empathy, respect, cordiality, sincerity, concreteness, confrontation, discretion, immediacy. They are essential skills in any helping profession. They are also necessary in accompanying people on their spiritual journey.

### 2 Spiritual Direction

The basic motive of spiritual direction is spiritual growth, relationship with God and discernment of spirits that takes place in a relationship. Barry and Connolly (1982) state that spiritual direction is in a way an art, science and help given by one Christian to another. The one who wants to be guided chooses the accompanist. The authors, in their long experience, have developed a definition where they characterize spiritual direction as the help given by a Christian to another Christian in order to make him attentive to God who speaks to him personally, to dispose him to respond to his call, and to enable him to grow in intimacy with God and to help him to accept the implications of this relationship. Central to this type of spiritual direction is experience, not ideas, "any experience with that Other whom we call God" (Barry and Connolly, 1982, p.8).

In spiritual direction, complete freedom in the choice of the director is necessary, as well as complete trust in order to be able to confide everything to him or her. On the part of the director there is the capacity for relationship and witness. This is done through interpersonal skills through which the accompanist

creates an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding, which does not equate to affection. It promotes authenticity and genuineness, and knows how to navigate what is important. It reflects experience, is in touch with reality, and is aware of the cultural, religious and spiritual context of the accompanied. Medically, he or she has no serious neurotic or narcissistic difficulties, and can handle transference and the desire to fulfill their own needs, leading them to be free of their practices and techniques (ibid.).

We can say that from the time of Christ until well after the Reformation, little distinction was made between psychological and spiritual disorders. Many forms of insanity were thought to be spiritual problems caused by demon possession or moral deficiencies. This approach continued until the 19th century. Even after medicine began to develop and physical explanations for organic diseases emerged, psychology remained tied to faith and morality.

Change came with Freud and his psychoanalytic theory. His new approach suggested that the human mind could be studied scientifically through observation and measurement. This new turn took psychology out of the realm of the spirit and rooted it in empirical research. Within a few decades, psychotherapy and psychology replaced spiritual and moral guidance as the main method of alleviating mental suffering. There was a sudden boom in psychological theories that dealt not only with mental disorders but with all areas of human life and human development. In general, we could say that people began to turn to psychologists with their problems, while religious practices became emptied and lost their life-transforming power (May, 1992). It seemed that the faith tradition and spiritual direction that continued to be offered in the church no longer satisfied people's need for wholeness, health and happiness.

The first attempts of integration began among Protestant ministers who had completed psychological training and integrated these new disciplines into their ministry. The practice of pastoral counseling and clinical pastoral education was born. In these settings, clergy could provide people with individual in-depth counseling, but in most cases this counseling was increasingly psychological and less and less spiritual (May, 1992). Gradually, various churches began to integrate psychology as a helping tool, although there has always been some distrust and some resistance to psychology in church circles, and it continues to be there up to this day.

We can see that empirically based research is leading to the recognition that spirituality may be part of the solution for many people, while for others spirituality may be part of their problem. Surveys also show that people want spiritually sensitive help (Pargament and Murray-Swank, 2005). This suggests that spirituality cannot be separated from psychotherapy, and there is a growing conviction that spiritually integrated counseling can work (Kovari, 2016).

### 3 Pastoral counseling

The main role of pastoral counseling is to help clients cope with emotional, moral and physical stressors, as well as to help them cope with crisis and loss of meaning in life. Pastoral counseling as described in the 2014-2015 Loyola University Maryland Graduate Programs Handbook is defined in psychological rather than religious language. The program itself is holistically oriented and helps the person search for the meaning of life in all its complexity. It is eclectically focused, incorporating person-centered approaches, namely cognitive, behavioral, psychodynamic, and working with family systems. It views human behavior and human experience as an integration of psychological, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions. It defines pastoral counseling as a supportive relationship that intentionally includes in its approach a client's openness to spirituality and religion, with the goal of the client's growth on an emotional and psychological level. This approach has undergone many evolutions into the form we know it today. Pastoral counseling, according to Lartey (2003), is counseling that focuses on the whole person and their well-being as someone who is

part of a family - a social unit. The client is seen as a whole person with body, mind and spirit, with reference to their psychological, theological and ethnic background. In pastoral counseling, the person is guided to understand their issues in the context of everyday experiences, because through them they can find the answer to their questions. Pastoral counseling uses resources that emphasize the counselor's ability to relate to people, to motivate and guide them to take risks and make choices that will help them to be whom they are meant to be. The author mentioned above states that in pastoral counseling different approaches are defined:

- Secular approach - is focused on the personal welfare and wellbeing of the person being cared for.
- Religious - takes into account the client's religious beliefs insofar as the client brings them to counseling.
- Christian - is from a biblical, strongly evangelical perspective that includes elements of Protestantism. It is a direction that currently accepts and implements both scientific research as well as the theological aspect.

In terms of content, pastoral counseling is more structured and more complex compared to spiritual conversation. It needs an official requirement, is followed by setting time and space, and an agreement on payment. In this it is similar to psychotherapy. To do it, the person providing such help needs appropriate training and skills in the helping profession.

According to Montgomery (2010), there are three types of pastoral counseling:

- Short-term - one problem-solving session;
- A time-limited form that uses problem-solving or solution-focused methods and which usually lasts two to five sessions;
- Long-term form, called pastoral psychotherapy, whose approach depends on the therapeutic school and focuses on personality change (Kovari, 2016).

### 4 Comparison of counseling, spiritual direction and pastoral counseling

Stewart-Sickling (Lecture, 2014) explains the difference between counseling, pastoral counseling and spiritual direction as helping approaches.

The first approach is hedonistic, which pursues what is beneficial for the person. Religious and spiritual resources are used more as a means to meet emotional, mental and physical needs. The counselor must know the client's resources and culture.

The second is health, which is expressed through a eudaimonic approach - living a good life, strictly from a health perspective. The counselor assesses everything related to a person's developmental periods. The psychological and spiritual approach is part of the conversation, as values and tradition help to describe goals. The counselor is more informed about the client's tradition of faith and values.

The third approach is holiness, which is also related to the eudaimonic approach, but is more focused on the person's moral attitude, their desire and pursuit of beatitude. The counselor looks at things from God's perspective. Religion and spirituality are shaped by life itself. In this approach, the spiritual perspective influences all the other perspectives. Values and traditions are central, explicit, and the guide and the client have a commitment to deepen the client's faith.

Based on these three goals, Stewart-Sickling (ibid.) says that counseling is concerned entirely with the first and partly with the second. Spiritual direction deals partly with the second and wholly with the third. Pastoral counseling deals with wholly the first, partly the second, and partly the third.

Consequently, during pastoral counseling, what is important is pastoral presence that cannot be seen or heard, that cannot be

physically touched; it is an inner attunement to the client, and this takes place in the person of the pastoral counselor.

#### 4.1 The pastoral counselor

Pastoral counselors are characterized by sense of awe, reverence, and mystery. They live in the presence of God and are aware of the power of their own presence as they let God's healing power shine forth. They are characterized by personal integrity, maturity. They know pain and suffering from their own experience, so that they become able to be with others in their suffering without being swept away by it. They are able to enter into a therapeutic relationship that is rooted in well-grounded theoretical knowledge and ethical behavior. They are reconciled to themselves, to others and to God and are able to promote reconciliation and transformation. Pastoral helping professionals live and practice in a "circle of grace" (Wicks, 2007).

Barry Estadt, co-founder of the Department of Pastoral Counseling at Loyola College in Maryland, captures the very essence of the profile of the pastoral helping professional: "The pastoral counselor ... is a [religiously] (today we would say spiritually) integrated person, ... who approaches others with a sense of mystery, ... together with the ability to enter into communion with others in the context of therapeutic help, ... with the aim of reconciliation and personal religious integration." Jordan (1986) understands the counselor as a guide to a good life who steps forward and serves as a living example along the way. Townsend (2009) emphasizes the necessity for the pastoral counselor to be personally and religiously integrated, successful in his or her own therapy, and able to demonstrate, form, and sustain a therapeutic relationship with the client. True presence requires a counselor's heart that facilitates a genuine attunement to the client that goes from heart to heart. It is a space in which the counselor understands the client more deeply.

#### 4.2 Dynamics of the pastoral counselor

Cheston (2000) expresses this in the paradigm of pastoral counseling where she describes the dynamics of the pastoral counselor and the process itself as:

- The way of being

Cheston (2000) says that what makes pastoral counseling unique is the person doing the counseling. It is their way of being, who that person is, the degree of empathy they have, the values they present, the boundaries that are clearly set and the importance of the relationship with the client.

- They way of understanding

Cheston (2000) says that the way of understanding the client is a major part of the counseling process. It is based on knowledge that is based on theoretical approach and structure, normal and abnormal development and different ways to effect change. The counselor uses different variations of skills, forms of approach and techniques.

- The way of intervening

The method of intervention is the work itself; it is the means through which the counselor interprets the client's dysfunctional cycles and encourages the process of alternative thinking, feeling and behavior.

Pastoral integration therefore occurs when we can define the helping relationship as a method of healing (therapeutic) intervention that takes place within a constructive, creation-affirming theology (Cooper - White, 2011).

The helping relationship becomes pastoral not because spiritual topics are addressed in sessions or issues of the client's faith or religious practice are discussed. The client may not even be religious at all and may not be interested in any spiritual topic, but the helping relationship will still be pastoral because of the integrated presence of the practitioner that makes the "spiritual force field" tangible and operative in the therapeutic encounter.

## 5 Conclusion

We can see that pastoral counseling is entering into a special relationship with the client and deepening the pastoral approach - which can be described as bringing my spiritual self into the process of therapy with the client (seen through a theological vision). This situates pastoral counseling as an interdisciplinary approach between theology and the social sciences.

Pastoral counseling seems to be a new phenomenon in our cultural environment. It is important that in defining this ministry or profession, we also communicate with practitioners from other helping professions to seek a definition that takes into account the whole person developing within the context of our cultural, social, moral, and spiritual values.

Wicks (2012) states that we cannot give what we do not have, therefore it is important for the pastoral counselor to be rooted in their religion, practicing a long term spiritual life, such as meditation, prayer, reflection, spiritual reading and spiritual direction. Implementing these practices will help them to be humble, compassionate, and grateful. These elements are essential qualities for developing a healing relationship in the counseling room.

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